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PART I.

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THE NATURE AND USE OF BEAUTY.

INTRODUCTION.

THE CULTURE OF ART.

THERE exists to every nation to whom the power of self-refinement has been given, the duty of using and cultivating Art—not only as a refining but as a spiritualizing agent. The extent and weight of this duty may be debated by many, but the existence of it in some form, or to some extent, is denied wholly by scarcely any one who is capable of thinking on such matters. It is to explain the influence of Art, and to urge that duty, by showing the importance of that influence on the character of nations, as well as individuals, that we enter on this discussion.

There is something in the culture of Art more important than to buy pictures, or even to admire pictures—of greater moment than supporting individual artists in the pursuit of their studies. That which is done to encourage personal exertion, or to repay it, has no further field of good than exists in the person for whom it was done, unless it was based on the recognition of a principle, when it acts beneficially as far as the principle is published or understood. In fostering Art, therefore, it is essential to give our warmest encouragement to those *principles* which have the highest vitality, and on which the noblest results depend, and among its diverse qualities to distinguish always those which especially characterize it, and separate it from things which superficially and partially resemble it, so that we may not expend our labors idly, by striving to develop traits which are of minor consideration, and which, being dependent on nobler and more vital ones, must come as a consequence of those—or which belong to the Artisan rather than the Artist. It should be remembered, then, that the primary object in Art-culture, should be to develop those faculties of the human whole which form the artistic element in its composition, and give birth to the Idea, rather than those which are only the instruments of its expression to the world.

Now, Man has in one person three grand functions, and no analysis can discover another, or divest him of one of these, still leaving him a complete man. They may

seem different when regarded from different points of view, but they are essentially the same wherever employed. The Moral, the Intellectual, and the Physical, become, in our more poetical form of expression, the heart, the head, and the hand, and considered in relation to the results of Art, they produce the man of feeling, the man of science, and the man of execution. The individual who should combine the full measure of each of these attributes, would be the perfect Artist, and in accordance with the predominance of either in any given person, is the person characterized as moral, intellectual, or mechanical in Art. In order, therefore, to the most successful culture of Art, we must determine which of these is the vital element, that which distinguishes it from all other human occupations, and learn how we may reach it to energize and purify it. If it be a matter of the hand, we must have schools to train the hand; if of the intellect, we understand well how to discipline that; but if it be of neither, there remains nothing but that it should belong to our moral natures, and must have a fitting education.

The mechanical portion of the result, which, for want of definite nomenclature, we call Art, is that which in general makes the Artisan—we call it execution, and it differs in no material respect from the same power when employed in the strictly mechanical occupations. It demands training of the eye to see, and the hand to reproduce, certain external qualities of things which apply to the senses for recognition. To shape an axe-helve after a pattern, or to follow the lines of a vessel, are feats as difficult and praiseworthy as to copy in marble the clay model of the sculptor, or to reproduce the outline of any natural object; and the nice graining of wood requires a finer sense of color than many really thoughtful artists possess. The business of the artisan is simply to reproduce from a given object its precise likeness, in whatever branch of human labor, and it does not matter whether this object be one of mechanical use, a work of art, or one of nature—considered in itself, the reproduction has the same rank, employing none of those faculties which address themselves to our higher natures, and the possession of which compels us to honor men above their

fellows who do not possess them. Imitation demands nothing beyond a sense of color and the capacity to judge of distances, and though sometimes, as in exact studies of an artist from nature, the work of the Artisan may awaken in us feelings which appeal to our higher natures, it is from some thought or association in our minds which the work awakens to activity, and a photograph would accomplish the same result. Still the Artisan's is a necessary function in Art, both because we need and enjoy these mere reproductions, even if photographic, and because to success in that which lies beyond, this is indispensable as a means, and as a component of the *perfect* Artist; and every artist must first have gone through the thorough mechanical training requisite to fill this subordinate function, the perfect and precise imitation of things seen leading to the embodiment of things "felt," or seen mentally. Lord Byron says of poets, that "the one who executes best is the highest, whatever his department, and will be so rated in the world's esteem." And this, though not true in the light of the highest critical knowledge, is, so as far as practical criticism and the "world's esteem" are concerned. So far as the encouragement of Art is concerned, we do better to honor the perfect transcriber of nature, than one who, with higher aims, perfects nothing—but we do not recognize, in the greatest conceivable perfection of the Artisan's work, the response to the demands of Art—there is something higher needed.

The relation which the man of science bears to Art, is more of an interior kind. He sees minutely and thoughtfully, and notes carefully and accurately, all the facts which the visible universe offers to him. He studies with enthusiasm the laws of the organization of nature, knows the characteristics of flowers, the structure of trees, and the geological phenomena of the surface of the earth, better than any landscape painter, anatomy better than the figure painter, and the lines of water in motion more entirely than the marine painter, and may, in all these respects, possess all the knowledge which Art demands. He may be an artisan also, and thus a scientific draughtsman. Add to this the science proper to Art, that of systems, the laws of com-

position, perspective, etc., and then let the man of science produce a work which shall display all these acquirements. We shall have a picture, perhaps, correct in every respect, full of knowledge, but it will be lifeless, and repel rather than attract you. There is something more than this demanded, and that something, when we find it, is the soul of Art. The perfect Artist makes a picture less accurate in its science, not entirely correct, it may be, in anything—proclaiming the ignorance of its maker of the most important laws of the universe, *scientifically* speaking, but it will kindle your soul into a glow and rouse you into a generous enthusiasm, so that you will love it.

The man of science is a seeing man, and all facts which come to the cognizance of the intellect purely, come to him to be kept and classified, but all things are of equal interest to him—the Stramonium and the Daisy—the Poplar and the Elm—they are all facts, and if one is more valued than another, it is from the chance of its being rarely met with. But the Artist, though he may see less perfectly, sees something which the other does not. There is something in a Daisy which science does not grasp, and a quality in the Elm which attracts him to it especially. He has preferences in nature, and they do not depend on the scientific or mercantile value of the objects, but upon something which speaks to his heart and awakens his love. He passes heedlessly by one flower, but rests with rapture before another, and the scientific man for his life can find no law by which he does so, or any reason for his preference. It may be its tint, it may be its form, or it may be a meaning it has to the Artist, which constitutes the charm he finds in it. Be it what it may, it is this indefinable, unscientific, incommunicable quality which makes it matter of Art, and if you ask the Artist about it, he will only say he found the one more beautiful than the other, and in this response, as in an oracle, lies the whole revelation we seek. It is this mysterious and entrancing quality called Beauty that is the life and soul of Art, and the better understanding and fuller perception of which should be the end of all artistic education. The training of the hand does not bring it to us, for the Artisan, we have found, is the same in manufacture as in Art; the intellect cannot discover it, for the mightiest minds are devoid of the perception of it, and works whose greatness is incontestable, whose power is wonderful, are lifeless and without effect on the hearts of men from the want of it, while children, and the unschooled, and feeble-minded, are often very sensitive to it, even to ecstasy, and the works of

men of the most limited range of intellect are touching and ennobling from the possession of it alone. They err greatly who rank artists according to their mere greatness, as many, from pride and admiration of unsanctified power, often do. On this point, hear the witness of the greatest of artists, intellectually as well as mechanically; one who, if any one ever could be, would be distinguished by, and honored for, his power—Michael Angelo.

"Beauty was given at my birth, to serve
As my vocation's faithful exemplar,
The light and minister of two sister Arts:
Who otherwise believes, in judgment errs.
She alone lifts the eye up to that height
For which I strive, to sculpture and to paint.
O rash and blind the judgment that diverts
To sense the Beauty, which in secret moves
And raises each sound intellect to Heaven.
No eye inform the interval may pass
From mortal to divine, nor thither rise
Where without grace, to ascend, the thought is
vain."*

In following out the divisions we have made, for comparison's sake, we need a more definite nomenclature than we at present possess, and without any intention of assuming the right to make one for general acceptation, we shall adopt such terms in this investigation as may seem best fitted to define our ideas so clearly as to be beyond the danger of confusion. We term all things art which men do with skill, and in general terms we say the fine arts and the useful arts, but in spite of this, by our use of the term artist to distinguish those who follow the former from those who follow the latter, we recognize a vital distinction between the dignity of the functions which each performs, and at the same time an ideal Art which we place far above those things which we understand under the general term, arts, and to this universal instinct of its worth we appeal for justification of the appropriation of the term to that which reaches after Beauty, the Ideal, which we shall always term Art, and the seeker, *par excellence*, of the Ideal, the Artist—while to the whole range of science and mechanical ability, which is the means of conveying that Beauty to the eyes of others, we shall apply the term Technique, and the painter or sculptor who is (or as far as he is) devoted to the executive or intellectual qualities which are subservient to Art, "handling," drawing, composition, breadth, light and shade, in short, all that we may learn, we shall call the Technist. The Artist may also be Technist—must be to a certain extent—but his rank as an Artist must in nowise depend upon technical excellence, and the mere Technist can never take rank among Artists, however great his ability as such.

* John Edward Taylor's translation.

We shall make our position clearer, perhaps, by showing the analogy between Art (in our sense) and Poetry, the former being devoted to forms and appearances, the latter to ideas, the Artist and Poet being different manifestations of the same spirit of Beauty, while he whom we have termed the Technist, in one case, corresponds to the Versifier, the writer, in the other. It is to insist on the justice of such a distinction, and on the estimation of Art which would ensue, that we desire to unfold the real nature and spiritual worth of Beauty on which that distinction is based, which object this following investigation has in view. It is to establish the claim of Beauty to the position of a moral influence, and to show that the perception of it can only be cultivated through the moral nature, that we shall study. We shall make use of the labors of other men in the same field without hesitation, and shall commence at the point where nothing is taken as understood, since we neither care to claim originality of investigation, or newness of views, so much as to leave nothing unexamined which may serve to elucidate the subject. It must not be expected that this elucidation will be easy or easily followed—the subject is too deep, and the avenues of approach to it too abstruse, to permit that we can make it *readily* comprehensible, or comprehensible to all persons. It is a study of man's very inner soul, and, like all abstruse subjects, will be untasteful or unintelligible to most men, but we hope to be always clear to those who can, and will, give thought enough to follow us through our demonstrations. *It is impossible* to make it absolutely clear to all minds.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRESENCE OF BEAUTY.

THERE is a word in our language of most subtle and philosophical signification, comprehensive and Protean in its meanings:—the World. To the most of us it is a vague term, and we only feel it as applying to something which lies around us unmeasured and immeasurable in every direction, wide as the range of thought, high as far as heaven, and deep to the infernal abysses. It would puzzle most of us to define our acceptations of the term, as when we speak of deference to the world, the wisdom and folly of the world, and in the next breath, of the world of Nature and its divisions, yet there are two broad meanings which it bears—humanity and the influences of it as opposed to the true spiritual elevation; and the range of the material creation. What is there in common between the busy whirling humanity,

whirling it would seem like a maelstrom to engulf in darkness all that comes within its influence, dragging down into depths of pride and sin those gorgeous human argosies laden with the wealth of immortal hopes, and the broad, beautiful nature from which come our most ennobling and elevating enjoyments—between that world which Christ divided from Him and his by the most positive of divisions, and that from which he drew his most touching lessons, and to whose influences he led his followers as to a sphere of blessedness and repose.

But there is a close analogy, and one which will prove the key to our study into this most abstruse subject. The philosophy of language is here deep and admirable. Nature is an aggregate of objects, no one of which can we admit to be perfect, yet all speak of a perfection. They have all, absolutely speaking, a certain amount of attractiveness to us, yet, judging comparatively, some are repulsive. So of humanity—it is an assembly of human souls, each imperfect and degraded, but, however repulsive any particular individual may be, there is a something in him which attracts our sympathy when we regard him truly, and each one bears witness of a perfection some way attainable. The natural world is a tangled maze, when we contrast it with our conception of Eden—thorns and thistles curse it, and its deficiencies are everywhere manifest. And thus Man, in his present state, seems but a collection of partial beings, confused and blinded, and devoid of order and harmony. But in both cases there are certain individuals whom we select as more lovely than others, and whom, by comparison, seem perfectly organized. They receive our admiration and love, although they are in truth only portions of that inharmonious whole, and really far from perfect in themselves. They are alike, then, in their degradation, these two worlds. Redeem them! Take from one its thorns and thistles and set its tangled paths in order, replacing its imperfect members by perfect ones, and from the other take sin and its consequent sorrow and deformity, turn its million faces upward, knit its numberless hearts together in love and harmony, and then compare them again. We find a certain community in the feeling which we entertain towards both—a common cause of pleasure, and if we consider carefully how we shall define the difference between the perfect and the imperfect states, we shall find it expressed by "more beautiful."

We meet a fellow-being in our way who seems to us thus redeemed, filled with a

divine spirit, earnest, truthful, living, forgetful of self in seeking her appropriate place in the harmony of creation, and we say: "beautiful spirit." Again, we wander into the broad fields, and when Nature has attuned us to a loving perception of her, we may find a wild rose blooming contentedly in the hedge, where its position was assigned it, and we say, "beautiful flower." It is not the humility and content we perceive in one and attribute to the other which is the basis of the emotion we receive from them, for if one had been an arch-angelic spirit, burning his life into light for his fellow man, or, the other had been a perfect and stately tree, we should still have said "beautiful." We apply the same word to the soul and the plant, because we receive the same sensation from analogical, or like qualities in both.* This analogy is the key we seek, since, if it is made clear that the quality in the flower which we call beauty is a type or correspondence of that which in the soul we also call beauty, it follows that it is something not belonging to forms of inanimate Nature, but which, and the perception of which, pertains to the soul, and especially to the moral faculties of the soul, for all spiritual beauty is the manifestation of spiritual elevation and perfection, conditions only appreciable to our moral sense, and therefore, in their types, appealing to the same sense alone.

Having found this key to the question in the world of humanity, we will leave that to more purely ethical investigators, and give ourselves entirely to the world of matter, to the Beauty of visible form, the Beauty of Art. By our key we have learned that it addresses itself to our moral feelings, and by those feelings rather than by purely intellectual reasoning, should it be studied. Geometry does not compass it, we see and

feel it, but can never by any process communicate it or demonstrate its existence in any object. We may be affected by it even to tears, and another standing by our side see no cause for emotion—nor has language words which will explain the nature of that emotion to him who feels it not, no matter how comprehensive or acute his intellect may be. What and whence is it? We meet it in every way-side, see it in the lines of every human face—it rides in the clouds, flits in the sunbeam, dreams in the summer haze over the mountains, hides itself with the violet, climbs with the wild vine, gleams in the opal and burns over whole wildernesses in their autumnal flames. There is nothing of all God's creating which has it not to some degree, even the faces of the worst and basest of men, not losing their birth-gift entirely. It is a mystery, of which men generally only know that it is, and enjoy it blindly and thanklessly; blindly, because they do not see the foundation and use of it, and thanklessly, because they make no effort to cultivate the sense of it or render themselves worthy of it. It is a mystery, but it ought not to be—it is a thing to be studied and understood, and that we may cultivate the perception of it we must comprehend its nature clearly.

But let us, before going further, make the proper use of the term evident. It is perpetually misused by being made expressive of every quality which gives delight—the geometrician calls a demonstration beautiful, when he means that it is clear—the musician says "beautiful" when he means harmonious or melodious,—the politician applies to a certain scheme for the organization of society the name, "beautiful plan," when he should properly say an orderly one—the geologist terms an extraordinary specimen, "beautiful," or calls a collection a beautiful one, when he means of the former that it is highly characteristic, or of the latter, that it is complete—the mechanician considers a machine beautiful when it is really only admirably constructed, or well adapted for its purpose—the dreamer calls a theory beautiful when it is only comprehensive, and even the hunter says of an accurate shot, that it is a beautiful one. The same unconscious ambition which prompts men to call their occupations Arts, from an instinctive perception of the dignity of Art, leads them also to say of any excellence in them, that it is beautiful, while, justly, the term only applies to that quality in things which we can see, which shows us that the thing seen is in a state of progress towards perfection, or is, as compared with allied objects, more nearly perfect than they are,

* Thus to him, to this schoolboy under the binding dome of day, is suggested, that he and it proceed from one root; one in leaf and one in flower; relation, sympathy, stirring in every vein. And what is that root? Is not that the soul of his soul? A thought too bold—a dream too wild. Yet when this spiritual light shall have revealed the law of more earthly natures—when he has learned to worship the soul, and to see that the natural philosophy that now is, is only the first gropings of its gigantic hand, he shall look forward to an ever-expanding knowledge as to a becoming creator. He shall see that nature is the opposite of the soul, answering to it part to part. One is seal and one is print. Its beauty is the beauty of his own mind. Its laws are the laws of his own mind. Nature thus becomes to him the measure of his attainments. So much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own soul does he not yet possess. And we find the ancient precept, "Know thyself," and the modern precept "Study Nature," become at last one maxim.—R. W. Emerson (*The American Scholar*).

This may consist in its form, or it may be its color—if, in the impression we receive from it, we receive a pleasure which does not arise from an *intellectual consciousness* of its fitness of position or condition, but from a pure and unperplexed sensation of spiritual exaltation, arising from the contemplation of it as an unintelligent object of sight, we may be sure that it is owing to the recognition of the presence of Beauty. The exact nature of Beauty, and the precise manner in which it acts on the mind of man, we shall investigate in the succeeding chapters.

UNPAINTED PICTURES.

By Anna Mary Howitt,
Author of "An Art-Student in Munich."
NO. I.

A DESCENDANT OF THE VIKINGS.

November 21, 1854.—Lately in the evenings we have read aloud “Worsaae’s Great Britain,” thus my mind naturally has dwelt much upon our heroic Scandinavian ancestors, and the traces which still linger amongst us of those stern old times. This morning, whilst preparing for the day’s painting, besides visions of pictures to be drawn direct from Scandinavian story, and which were to be symbolic of the great and universal “Battle of Life,” there floated into my mind the thought, that spirit, even upon this earth, asserts its immortality, and how we have a proof of this at the present moment, in the undaunted courage and endurance of our soldiers in the Crimea, who are quickened by the self-same dogged heroism which animated their old Scandinavian forefathers.

Whilst thus meditating, I was summoned suddenly from my work to speak to an old beggar who had knocked timidly at the door. “Do come down to see the old fellow!” exclaimed my summoner, “he is marvellously picturesque, and has the very head to paint as a king of Thule, or as a dying Viking!”

In the raw dampness of the November morning, I found standing without the door, a tall, spectral old man with a crippled leg; he was trembling all over with age and cold. He offered cabbage-nets and lucifer matches for sale. Nothing more poverty-stricken and wan could well be imagined; he looked so feeble and ghostly that one felt as if the first rude winter’s blast must blow him away altogether. His hair, which hung from beneath the folds of a bluish green handkerchief, which was tightly bound over his head, was thin, long, and white as snow. His beard, also, was silvery white; his whole countenance bore the stamp of a singular refinement; his nose was delicately arched, and finely chiselled, and his deeply set eyes gleamed with a keen and clear brilliancy, in strange contrast with the hollowness of his cheeks, which had the yellow tints and texture of old parchment. These strange eyes were the eyes of a youth, gleaming forth in the sockets of an aged veteran. “Such a countenance truly,” thought I, “must the old Jarl Siward, Macbeth’s opponent, have had; he whose dying words Henry of

Huntington has chronicled,” and out of respect for the memory of the old Jarl and his heroic dying words, I bade the beggar enter and warm himself by the blazing kitchen fire.”

“And how,” asked I, “did you injure your leg?”

“That, miss, was off the African coast,” he replied; “my leg was shattered by a shell.”

“You were a sailor, then?” I remarked, still thinking of the old Scandinavian sea-kings.

“Yes,” he said; “he had been both sailor and soldier for many long years; had fought under Nelson and Wellington; was eighty-two years of age; had been in ten fierce engagements; had been in the Battle of the Baltic, the Battle of the Nile, and at Trafalgar; had been close to Nelson when he fell; he had been wounded by bayonet, by shell, and by musket; he had faced death in horrible forms by sea and by land, and yet death had not yet vanquished him.” And, as the old warrior spoke, his strange eye gleamed yet more brightly, and his voice became strong and clear. The soul of the old Scandinavian ancestor I felt was quick within him. With old dying Siward he might have exclaimed, “How shameful it is for me that I have never been slain in my numerous battles, but have been saved only to die with disgrace at last, like an old cow!”

But William Robinson, the old sailor and soldier of the nineteenth century, was filled with a gentler philosophy than that of Siward in the eleventh. Dropping his head upon his breast, and trembling with age and cold, though he sate upon the warm kitchen hearth, he folded his thin, yellow hands, and said: “Night and day, day and night, do I pray our Lord God to take me. He saved me in battle, and upon the sea, and in hospital. I pray Him now to take me, for my blood is no stronger than water, my wounds ache night and day, and I have no home. I pray our good Lord to take me soon, soon, and I know that He will hear me!”

“How,” said I, filled with a great compassion for the aged veteran, whose majestic figure shone like an aspen leaf—“how is it that you have not been pensioned, have not been provided for in Greenwich or in Chelsea—for, according to your account, you have a double claim upon your country?”

He replied that he had his shilling a day, which was his staff of life, and that he had had an offer of a home in Greenwich, but that his wife was then living, and he could not endure to be parted from her. “She was more than my right hand to me,” he said, “and was always slaving away, and always kept home bright and snug; but, now she is dead, and I wander about as you see me.” Of his children he had a long and doleful history to relate. It was a chronicle of the death of the good and kind, and of the ingratitude of the living. There truly was the history of a life in which all the stern endurance and combative nature of the old Viking ancestor, had full scope once more to assert itself!

December 18.—The old soldier has been here again. We have ascertained why he is not a pensioner in Greenwich or Chelsea. The poor old fellow had the conscience to confess to his expulsion from Greenwich!

Alas, like many an old Scandinavian ancestor, he had been vanquished by the Demons of Drunkenness! The love of a wandering life seems very rife in him. How could he rest contentedly between four walls month after month, and year after year, with nothing more enlivening or adventurous than a stroll through Greenwich or Chelsea? The old Scandinavian heroes, when they died, desired to have their funeral mounds raised high above them, their corpses close to the margin of the restless ocean, so that the spirit, when it grew weary of the narrow, quiet grave, might rise up through the mound and gaze forth over the vast expanse of tossing billows, and then become refreshed by a sense of immensity, liberty, and action. This deep, mighty yearning after freedom and restless life, is rooted firmly into the heart of many a wretched vagabond, and in the stirring of the old ancestral blood within his veins. O, magistrates and boards of guardians, how callous are your hearts towards these mysterious, poetic, Scandinavian yearnings which agitate the bosoms of the vagabond wretches brought up before you!

I like to hear the beggar veteran ramble on in discourse. I have been making a study of his fine old head, and whilst I paint, he “spins long yarns.” This morning he commenced talking about the great white bears he has seen prowling around the watch-fires when out upon an Arctic expedition; of the glories of the transient Arctic summer he spoke, and of the sublime marvels of the aurora; of combats with blacks upon the coasts of Africa, and of the burning skies of India. Something led him to speak of dreams. “Do I believe in dreams?” said he, “of course I do, miss, and so would you, did you know all the things which I have known.”

“What have you known,” asked I.

“I’ll tell you, miss, the first remarkable dream that ever I had to do with, and then you may judge for yourself whether I have not reason to think dreams are often prophecies. I must tell you,” pursued the old man, “that I was quite a little chap when my mother dreamed the dream that I’m going to tell you. My father had married late in life a young woman. I never remember him anything but quite an old man. We lived down in Cambridgeshire. My mother took in washing, and my father, old man as he was, was letter-carrier for the neighborhood. And wild, desolate places there was in those parts seventy and odd years ago, I can tell you. My father often tramped above thirty miles a day—for, though he was old, he was a very Hale man for his years; and a man as tall and strong as you’d wish to see. Sometimes it was no uncommon thing for him to be out on his rounds for a couple or three days together, so we never used to think anything of his absence. Once, when he was away, one winter’s night, or rather early in the morning—I remember it as clear as though it were last week, and yet it is above seventy years ago—mother woke me up suddenly; I was a little bit of a chap, and slept in a little crib beside my mother’s bed—and, says she, looking very scared—‘Bill, I know your father’s dead—something has happened to father!’ Her face was as white as the sheet, and the bed shook under her, she trembled so with a kind of an ague. ‘Lord o’ mercy, child—